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# THE BOY WHO DARE

A NOVEL BASED ON THE TRUE STORY OF A HITLER YOUNG

BARTOLETTI

THE BOY WHO DARED

SCHOLASTIC PRESS



## DAY 264

It's morning. Soft gray light slips over the tall redbrick wall. It stretches across the exercise yard and reaches through the high, barred windows. In a cell on the ground floor, the light shifts dark shapes into a small stool, a scrawny table, and a bed made of wooden boards with no mattress or blanket. On that bed, a thin, huddled figure, Helmuth, a boy of seventeen, lies awake. Shivering. Trembling.

It's a Tuesday.

The executioner works on Tuesday.

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"How can you call it a plot?" asks Helmuth. "It's one seventeen-year-old boy who shot one Nazi."

But Hugo won't listen. "Mark my words. It's a plot!"

The next day, to prove his point, Hugo waves the Nazi Party newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, with its thick black headlines that cry, *Outrage! World Jewry Attacks!*

"See?" he says. "I was right. And the Jews will pay for their cowardly act."

Two nights later, Mutti is clinking dinner dishes in the kitchen sink as Hugo dresses. The radio is on, has been on for two days, so Hugo can listen and sputter and shout about the news.

Hugo shrugs into his thick black coat, picks up his SS hat. He nuzzles Mutti's neck. "Be careful. Don't go out tonight," he says. "And don't wait up." There's a dangerous glint in Hugo's eyes.

Hugo leaves. Helmuth stands at the window, watches as Hugo crosses to the corner. It's drizzling. The black pavement gleams wet. The street is quiet. Oddly quiet. No police. No pedestrians. Just the distant rumble of a streetcar.

Under the gas lamp, Hugo greets several men. All are wearing uniforms. They stand proudly as if their

uniforms make them something. Two are so drunk they lean against each other.

The night seems ordinary enough. Just a bit darker than usual. A bit quieter.

Mutti calls Helmuth from the window. She has changed the radio station, and a Wagner opera now fills the flat. "Come dry," she says to Helmuth, pressing a dish towel into his hand.

As Helmuth dries the last dish, the Wagner opera is interrupted. A newscaster breaks in with a special report. The Nazi official, Ernst vom Rath, has died.

After that, the night explodes. Helmuth hears distant shouts. Crashing. Splintering. The roar of engines. Trucks come and go all night.

The next morning, just as Gerhard and Helmuth finish breakfast, Hugo stumbles in the door. The smell of smoke hangs on his coat. There's a strange look of feverish excitement in his bloodshot eyes, making them a sharper and brighter blue.

Mutti brings him two soft-boiled eggs in blue eggcups and a thick slice of rye toast. Hugo grabs a knife, hatches off the tops of his eggs. He dunks the bread in the runny yolks and gobbles it down.

Hugo turns on the radio. In full cry, the newscaster erupts with the details of spontaneous riots against the



Jews that have taken place all over Germany. It's all in retribution for the Jew who killed the Nazi official in Paris. Synagogues are burned down or nearly demolished. Jewish shops, stores, businesses, and private homes ransacked and destroyed. Jews arrested and trucked away.

"It's terrible," says Mutti. She touches Hugo's neck, folds down the collar on his shirt.

"I agree. It's not pretty," says Hugo. "People do terrible things when they're angry. But Jews must learn that they can't get away with murder."

Hugo finishes the second egg and his toast. He sucks the egg from his mustache, pushes away from the table, and heads to the bedroom. He collapses with a groan on the bed. Mutti follows him, and from the kitchen, Helmuth watches as she tugs off his boots, draws the blanket over him.

Helmuth wrestles a sudden wave of nausea as he realizes what Hugo did last night. But it's Gerhard who says something when Mutti returns. "How can you?" he whispers to Mutti. "You heard the news. How can you not say anything?"

Mutti bites her lip, doesn't answer for a long while, and when she does, she speaks without looking at her sons. "Silence is how people get on sometimes. I don't expect you to understand."

Helmuth's disgust turns to pain for his mother and disgust for himself. He recognizes silence. He's silent every night around Hugo. Every day at school when Herr Vinke says terrible things about Jews. Every meeting with the Jungvolk when they play games like "Capture the Jew."

Gerhard stalks out. Helmuth leaves, too. He heads toward school, and then changes his mind and turns toward the Grindel district. Nothing prepares him for what he sees — the work of Hugo and his Nazi friends — the ruined shops and businesses, the burned-out buildings, the smoldering synagogue, its colorful glass windows shattered; the looters, their arms heaped with clothing, shoes, everything they can carry; the splintered furniture; the weeping women pushing broken glass with their brooms. All around is misery and destruction.

Outside a pub, several drunken storm troopers sit in soot-covered uniforms, singing about the greatness of Germany. Helmuth catches the sour smell of beer, and it sickens him. He turns, catches his reflection in the window, loathes the silent German who stares back at him.

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*Dust motes swirl in the late-morning sunlight. Helmuth follows the swirling stream to the cell window, stands on tiptoe,*